

Andrew Jackson Donelson, September 3, 1829, from Correspondence of Andrew Jackson. Edited by John Spencer Bassett.

MEMORANDUM BY ANDREW J. DONELSON.¹

¹ Library of Congress, Donelson Papers. The memorandum is in A. J. Donelson's handwriting. Another copy is in the Jackson MSS., vol. 73.

Washington, September 3, 1829.

Memorandum of an interview held by Genl Jackson and Mr. Campbell, in the presence of Col. Towson and Andrew J Donelson on the 3d September 1829

This interview being the result of a previous disclosure by Mr. Campbell of certain transactions implicating the character of Mrs. Timberlake, now Mrs. Eaton, made on the evening of the 1st September to Genl Jackson, it is proper that I should state the substance of a conversation previously held with me by Mr. Campbell on the same subject, on the night of the 29th of August at my office, as giving a more full view of the understanding and motives of all the parties to this interview.

Mr. Campbell called upon me, and stated, that as I was the relative and intimate friend of Genl Jackson he felt it his duty to say in confidence to me, that during Mr. Ely's visit to Washington City last winter, governed by feelings of the most sincere friendship for the public and private character of the Genl, as well as a sense of duty to religion and the interests of the society in which he was performing the services of a Pastor, which he apprehended were about to sustain an injury by the appointment of Majr Eaton to the Cabinet; he was induced to relate to Mr. Ely a fact, which, in connection with the general belief of Mrs. Es bad character, if communicated to the President, might satisfy him, or

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enable him to judge, of the justice of that apprehension. This fact was this. That some time after he settled in this city, Mrs. Timberlake visited his family, some member of which returned the call as was usual; but soon hearing reports unfavorable to the character of Mrs. Timberlake who then lived in the family of Mr. Oneale, he was induced to make application to Dr. Craven to ascertain their cause, when the Dr gave him the following information—that he, the Dr, had on a certain occasion been called upon as he Mr C understood in his medical character to go to the house of Mr. Oneale, which he obeyed, and, upon entering it, was met and saluted by one of the ladies in the presence of Mrs. Timberlake in language like this, *you have lost a job Dr.—Mrs. T had fallen from her carriage, but it is now all over*, to all which Mrs. T assented.² Mr. Campbell continued, that the respectability of Dr. Craven, and the great confidence which he reposed in his integrity and goodness of character, left him no alternative but the belief of these circumstances, and that from the knowledge which he seemed to possess of dates and the situation of the family, it was impossible they could be true, and Mrs T be a chaste and virtuous lady. that adopting this conviction he had determined henceforward to have nothing to do with the subject, and would have adhered to this determination had he not been well apprised that the community from various other reasons had formed and long acted upon the same opinion of her want of character. that meeting with Mr. Ely whom he knew to be a valued friend of Genl Jackson, and full of the same apprehensions and fears that disturbed him, this *remote cause* for *his* was mentioned to him, with the expressed understanding that it might be disclosed before the formation of the cabinet, and that he never had been informed, until now told so by me, that it had not been till long after that event.

² Mrs. Mary B. Randolph, sister to Mrs. Eaton, was said to have been present when Dr. Craven made this professional visit. On Sept. 28, 1829, she sent the following statement to Jackson:

“I do not understand what Dr. Ely means by ‘this admitted instance of miscarriage’, as there was nothing passed on the subject but what I told you, and I have the most distinct recollection, of our, (Mrs. and myself) mentioning no other than that referred to before

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Mr. Eatons acquaintance with the family. Upon a trip to Blad. [Bladensburg] with Mr. Tim. [Timberlake] the horse took fright and she jumped from the Carriage, was carried to the Toll House and sent for by Her Father, on her return home Dr. Sim was called, but the feared accident prevented. I also perfectly recollect that Dr. E. remarked the conversation with Mr. Campbell and Himself was in the presence of Mrs. Ely and Her Brother. Dr. Craven's name was to[?] me first mentioned."

He added in conclusion that Mr Ely had now called upon him to give up his name, at the instance of Mrs. Eaton who had been lately to Philadelphia for this purpose, which he had been always ready to do, and indeed had authorised Mr. Ely so to do originally. And he wished me to apprise the President of these facts, and to appoint an interview at as early a period after his arrival from the Rip Raps, which was on the first of September, as would be convenient. I declined a conversation with the President on the subject, but concurred in the propriety of his waiting upon him, and making such explanation of his motives as he thought due to them, and the delicate situation in which he was placed. This call he made on the 1st of September.

The interview which succeeded in the presence of Col Towson and myself on the 3d was introduced by the President, who, in referring to the subject of his last conversation with Mr. Campbell, remarked that he understood the facts in regard to the miscarriage to be located some time in the year 1821; and that he had been therefore particular in looking over some accounts which were thought to be in the handwriting of Mr. Timberlake, and if so, proved that he was in Washington during that year—that there was besides strong reason for the belief that he did not leave the city until sometime in the year of 1824, as he had seen him in the winter of '24 and was informed he did not go to sea for some period after. Mr Campbell replied that the President had misunderstood him—that it was impossible from the time of his own arrival in the city, and the delay to which he was subject in furnishing his house which was in 22, that he could have located these facts in the year before, or at any time preceding the occupation of his house, in the parlour of which the conversation with Dr. Craven occurred. The President reiterated

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his conviction that he had been positive in fixing the transactions in the year 1821. Mr. Campbell remarked that he did not give any dates to the transaction and tho asked by the President at this time would not say positively. The circumstances were however again related by Mr. Campbell, with some memoranda from the sea books placing dates in the year 1822, which he thought would determine Mr. Timberlakes absence for at least a sufficient time to give to the statement of Dr. Craven, the possibility, if not the certainty of truth.

The President then went further; and alluded to the improbability of the Dr not having left with his family some impressions of his distrust of Mrs. T's virtue; mentioning also the substance of an interview which Mr. Eaton and lady had with the old lady and her daughter, wherein they had disavowed any knowledge of such a circumstance as that related by Mr. Campbell. Mr. Campbell replied that Col. Towson and himself had a description of that interview from those ladies, which the Col. related in these words—that, Mrs. Eaton went privately to the bed chamber of the daughter, and referring to Col Towson as having requested the interview she was about to hold, proceeded to state the transaction ascribed by Mr Campbell to the authority of Dr. Craven. After having done which she mentioned the importance of her denying it, as otherwise blood might be spilt, a challenge having already passed; and at least a suit would grow out of it which might embarrass their estate, that the lady answered she knew nothing about law, but in the event of her being called upon to speak in court she would tell the truth. That the old lady told Majr Eaton, that Mr. Timberlake had been in the habit of unbosoming himself to Dr. Cravan, that he had left impressions not favourable to the character of Mrs. T, that reports of this kind had long existed, and that it was singular she should now be called upon to do away prejudices which he must know had been of long standing and that in this spirit Mr. Timberlake had said to him he must go to sea. And that Mr. Eaton said in reply that “man born of woman is full of trouble.”

Mr. Campbell also related the substance of an interview with Mr. and Mrs. Eaton at which Col. Towson was present. In this Mr. Eaton expressed his determination to punish Mr

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Campbell's levity, contradicted Mr. C's account of the conversation they had previously held together, but not until Mrs. E had asked in terms of much surprise if he permitted any one to speak thus. Mr. Campbell maintained the accuracy of his recollection and his determination not to be driven from the truth by terrors of blood. etc.

The President concluded a very animated comment upon the delicacy of Mr. C's situation, the danger of listening to the reports of the malevolent, or to the verbal statements of dead men when they intended to injure the character of the living; remarking to Mr. C that he had done his duty; that he had confidence in Majr Eaton not to be shaken by any thing but the most unquestioned evidence, that he would now leave to his own reflection the course which his sense of justice to himself, to Majr Eaton, and to christianity, recommended.

Col. Towson also brought to the Presidents recollection a conversation held with him previous to the formation of the cabinet in which he stated his conviction that in consequence of reports in circulation³ injurious to Majr Eaton his appointment would be a most unfortunate one, that such was his own opinion and that of the Presidents friends generally. Col. Towson also remarked that he had expressed the same sentiment personally to Majr Eaton at a party given by Mr. Vaughan.⁴ Mr. Campbell also remarked that he was ready and anxious to vindicate himself before any competent tribunal, that he had conversed with Mr. Key, that he had taken his advice who had no doubt of his being able to sustain himself, and who entertained great fears from the prosecution as likely to disturb the administration, and do infinite injury to the reputation of Mr. Eaton.⁵

³ Note on margin: "Col. Towson did not assume the truth or falsity of the charges."

⁴ Charles R. Vaughan, the British minister.

⁵ The following note from Eaton to Jackson, Sept. 6, 1829, with Jackson's endorsement, appears in the Jackson MSS.:

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"Yr opinion is always of more value and consideration to me, than that of any other in the world. I shall accordingly act as you have requested."

Indorsement, in Jackson's handwriting: "Major Eatons answer to my note of the 6th Sepr 1829 *requesting* him in consequence of an interview I had with mr. Key, who waited upon me, as the friend of peace to try to have the matter between major E. and the Revd. mr Campble settled. I wrote major E. the note to which the within is an answer. A. J."

In this detail the substance and meaning of the parties are written as accurately as my memory would permit me. The particular speech, and the many repetitions and interruptions that would occur in a dialogue of this nature have not been preserved.

[*Signature* .]